

18.10.1944

To:

Nakhum Katz from Lida

Born in 1907, A Carpenter

Made Alia to Israel on 1.4.35

Nakhum, my dear and beloved brother,

I am taking advantage of the opportunity that a friend is sending a letter to Eretz Yisrael to his two sisters who live in Haifa, through a brother that lives in central Russia in the Eivanaouer district. I am renewing our correspondence that was cut off in 1941 when the Hitlerian murderers attacked us.

My beloved brother, there is not enough paper and ink to write everything in precise chronological order. This letter will have to do. Surly, you have read much in your newspapers and heard much on your radio of what happened to the Jews in the areas which the Germans conquered. But what was told was but one percent of what the Jews experienced, and to our sorrow, there are no more than one one-thousandth of the Jews remaining in the conquered areas. My beloved brother, we need to be strong and have nerves of steel to know the entire truth.

The war reached us on 22.6.41. The Germans bombed Lida until the entire city center was in flames. 1500 houses were burnt, among them our house and all of Shlos Street. During this time our father, may he rest in peace, was in Eishishok, with Shosha, and after that we did not see him. At the same time, Aaron arrived from the army. He and I moved to Zlatin. The house of Meir and his wife was also burnt, and so they moved to Zaratshe -- at the end of the street since almost all of Zaratshe was burnt.

It was the fate of Eishishok to be the place in which the first massacre of the Germans occurred. And there, on Rosh Ha'shanah of 1941, 4000 Jews were murdered, and amongst them our dear and beloved father, our sister Shosha and her husband Haim and their two children, also the older

woman Katz with her two sons -- the daughter Shosha-Feigaleh and her husband ran away. Thus ended the history of Eishishok. The town became Judenrein. In the mean time, in Lida, the blood-thirsty murderer organized a "ghetto" for all the Jews of Lida and its vicinity. They harassed us in the ghetto. We would go out to perform manual labor such as tearing down burnt walls and digging trenches. We were forced to wear a yellow patch in the shape of a Star of David on our chest. We were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks. We could not walk in Christian streets without the accompaniment of the police or the Germans. And for every transgression there was just one punishment – death. They fed us no more than 125 grams of bread mixed with straw per day. Of course, you understand that we had to sell everything that was saved from the fire to survive. We were forbidden to buy: when the S.S. or the police caught you it would end with death. And like this they shot in Lida 50-60 Jews every week for nothing. Every person had the right to harm us and to take our property. No law took us under its protection.

About the period from 29.6.41 to the historical day of 8.5.42 I wish to write in the next letter, after I receive an answer from you. I mention the date 8.5.42 which to the Jews of Lida was a sad day. On that day the blood-thirsty murdering Hitlerites shot 5200 of the 7000 Jews of Lida, among them our dear brother Meir and his wife. Amongst us there were Motel Rabinovitz his wife Dina and their daughter Hana Rabinovitz. (Their son Mitia was killed in Vilna. There in Vilna they had already shot all of the Jews and left no more than 6000.) And they were killed, that is Motel, Dina, and Hana Rabinovitz. We lived with them in the Ghetto. Murdered also were Mordechai Shmukler and his wife, and our cousin Zlate, our cousin Feigel Levin with her husband Yaacov Levin and his family, Yaacov Pupko and his wife Malka, their daughters Minka and Mirka and Minka's husband Kravitz. My fiancé Liba'le was also murdered with her family, and Aaron's fiancé was killed with her family.

The following day they killed in a similar manner in Shtutin, Radun, Vasilishok, Zeshalodeck, Voronovo, and Eveh – in every town they killed 90% of the Jews. In Radun on 11.5.42 we have additional losses – our sister Etel with her husband Yerakhmiel and their two daughters.

After the massacre there remained in Lida 1800 Jews. The Germans rounded up all of the remaining Jews from Eveh, Voronovo, Radun, and Shtutin in the Lida Ghetto, and again in the

Ghetto there were 5000 Jews. And again they harassed us in their usual ways. Every person in the ghetto had one square meter to live. Imagine how cramped it was. During this time a Partisan movement begins to organize amongst us. The population around us aside from the Germans, like the Poles and the Belorussians, cooperated with the Nazis against the Jews. They would hand over any Jew that escaped from the ghetto to hide in the forest. Of course, you know how anti-Semitic they were. They would turn in Jews that were hiding or Jews that prepared fake passports as Christians. It makes your hair stand on end. If only the surrounding population were neutral it would have been possible to save 50% of the Jews. To our sorrow, they were not lesser anti-Semites than the Germans, and even more so once the Germans gave them the right to kill Jews and rob their property. They were good servants. It is true, there were isolated acts of humanity, but they were like a drop in the ocean. On 7.3.43 Aaron escaped to the forest with a group of youths to a Partisan unit but sadly luck did not go his way – on 16.3.43 his unit encountered a patrol of Germans and police, and a battle ensued between uneven forces. The Germans were 100 strong and they a handful of Partisans. And he died on 16.3.43 as a hero, as a Partisan. We continued like this in the ghetto in Lida until 17.9.43. On that day the Germans gathered all of the Jews in Lida, and put them on trucks to be taken to Lublin to the famous concentration camp “Majdanek” to annihilate them. But 50 Jews escaped from the trucks, among them myself and our dear mother. I immediately ran to the forest and joined a Partisan unit. And I fought the blood-thirsty murderers in the name of my loved ones until the heroic Red Army liberated us from the murderers. Our mother also ran to the forest but of course the Partisans don't accept everyone, and by the time I was told that she had escaped from the trucks she was murdered in Dadikavah by a group of White Poles. Hertzal and his wife were also deported to Lublin.

Enough. I shall not write more today. When you answer me – where do you live? what do you do? what is happening with you? – then I shall write more. What I wrote is not even one percent of what needs to be written. I know that you will ask many questions: why did the youth not run away? Why did they go to the ‘Akeda’? I will answer all, but will say just one thing for now: family connections amongst us, the Jews, are so strong, that people went to the grave so as not to separate from their parents, their wives, their children, their beloved brothers and sisters. History

has not seen the equal of what happened to our Jews. The blood freezes in the veins when one tells the story. Imagine then how it must be to experience it.

My beloved brother, I implore you to be strong to bear all of the tragedies that I have written about. My life is tied to yours. More than you I do not have. My life without you is worthless. From the distance I hug and kiss you a thousand times. I plead with you again my dear and beloved brother – we must be strong as steel and iron to bear the burden. Tell the Jews of Lida the truth – as terrible as it is. Now in Lida there are gathered 100 Jews, all Partisans, all from Partisan units. I have no remaining friends or relatives. I am alone like a cobble stone. You are all my hope. I have no address, not even yours. Of the fate of our sister Hana'le and Moshe from Antwerp – I do not know. Check in Antwerp, maybe they are alive, I myself do not believe so. I am now not in Lida but in Aratishak, a small town 55 km from Lida. The Soviet authorities have appointed me as a bank manager. We are here only 3 Jews. Imagine our lives. In Eishishok, Feigaleh with her husband Moshe and a child are still alive – maybe you can contact them and write them. I conclude. Enough for today. I send you my brotherly regards from afar, I hug and kiss you without end.

My dear brother, stay healthy and strong,

Your brother Gershon